

May 9, 2005

Dear Friend:

On April 30th, I held a Town Hall meeting in Las Vegas, New Mexico to hear from veterans in my district. I heard from many veterans about their concerns with the President's budget for veterans' healthcare, benefits for reservists and national guardsmen and women, and the mental health of our troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

I expressed my belief that we need solutions for our veterans that reflect the new challenges of the 21st Century. To that end, I recently joined many of my colleagues in introducing the New GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century. Our bill addresses the numerous challenges facing active duty soldiers, combat veterans, military retirees, reservists and national guardsmen and women, and their families.

A principle concern of the veterans who attended my Town Hall meeting was adequate healthcare funding. Thousands of veterans returning home from overseas will rely upon the VA for treatment of their combat injuries and post-deployment mental health care. The level of funding for veterans care should not be subject to political posturing, and should be an assured amount each fiscal year. I am an original cosponsor of H.R. 515, which provides for an assured adequate level of funding for veterans health care, based on the number of veterans it serves and the medical inflation rate for hospitals. I will continue to advocate for this bill's passage.

A continuing concern for many reservists and national guardsmen and women in New Mexico is equity in education benefits. Many national guardsmen and women and reservists have served two years on active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan over multiple deployments. I believe they deserve full active duty educational benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB). Currently, however, only soldiers who have served two continuous years of duty qualify for the benefit. I support changing the law so that soldiers who have served for two cumulative years over a period of five years, can take advantage of these important education benefits. Moreover, when student reservists are called to active duty, they should be guaranteed refunds of tuition and fees paid for the term they cannot complete. I support a bill that guarantees these educational rights.

An ongoing concern with many military retirees in my district is the fact that many of them are unable to receive both their full disability pay and full their retirement pay. Congress recently authorized full concurrent receipt for all qualifying retirees with 100% disability ratings, but other veterans are still waiting to receive the full benefits they were promised. I support a bill that provides full concurrent receipt now for military retirees who have 20 or more years of service.

These are only a few of the issues I heard about during my Town Hall meeting, and all of these initiatives are part of the New GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century. This bill recognizes the sacrifices made by those who have served their country honorably, as well as the sacrifices made by their families. It honors the promises we have made to our veterans, and updates our current laws so that we can better serve those who serve their country. For more information on my work on behalf of veterans, please [click here](#).

Very truly yours,

Tom Udall
Member of Congress